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## Honor, Respect & Responsibility (HR2) Character Education Project

Montana's Honor, Respect & Responsibility (HR2) Project proposes to address the programmatic barriers that impeded total success of the Montana Character Education Project (MCEP), our first attempt to develop a state character education initiative. Both initiatives target American Indian youth in grades K-8, although the program can easily be adopted statewide. The primary reason for the sub-group priority is that state data confirms that Indian students are significantly left behind in education achievement. As a small ethnic group, there is also very little research available upon which to build strategies to address the problem. MCEP attempted to close the disparity gap through character education as part of school reform from the following research citation: "Most teachers of American Indian students 'assume' that all their students (irrespective of the students' racial, ethnic, or cultural background) want to model their lives in conjunction with traditional conventions and belief systems promoted in most schools....and take for granted that all students hold a White, American, middle-class reference group identity." (Marshall 2002)

This is not the goal of Indian education in Montana, or of most parents of Indian children. "Culture is not checked in at the door; it enters the classroom; culture is not checked in at the door; at times it takes precedence; culture is not checked at the door, it is a lifestyle." (Barfield & Charette, 2002) The goal in Indian communities is to create a school system that will preserve and protect tribal cultural traditions and values, **and** also provide a learning environment where children develop competency of those skills necessary to achieve success in the mainstream White, middle-class school culture, too.

It is therefore the goal of the Honor, Respect and Responsibility project to increase American Indian student success in Montana by building on what we have learned to implement and evaluate a character education program that:

- 1) is bi-culturally relevant,
- 2) can be integrated into classroom instruction,
- 3) is aligned to state standards, and
- 4) can be integrated into existing school reform efforts.